

The correspondence column is back

Michael Burch

See *Featured Correspondence* on page 753

For many years now, selected letters to *Heart* have been published online (http://heart.bmj.com/cgi/eletters?lookup=by_date&days=30), where active debate proceeds in a somewhat ethereal state that does not always reach the consciousness of our readers.

At the time of writing, six original research articles¹⁻⁶ have attracted online correspondence in just the last 21 days, but a straw poll has revealed that many of us do not take the time to read this thought-provoking material. This issue of *Heart* sees a return of the correspondence section to the paper journal where we have featured the debate generated by the editorial of Ashrafian and Bogle,⁷ in which new guidelines for antimicrobial prophylaxis for endocarditis were discussed. The views expressed are stimulating and illustrate how a correspondence section can contribute importantly to our understanding and development of new ideas.

The new correspondence section will provide a platform for the views of our readers and will, we hope, encourage a wider spectrum of informed debate than is achieved online. This is important because it will extend the peer review process and put the material we publish under greater scrutiny so that its value to the scientific community can be better judged. It will also provide interesting and occasionally combative reading for those who prefer browsing the paper journal to scanning the *Heart* website. But if your only access to *Heart* is

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electronic, you can be reassured that all correspondence will continue to appear online. Indeed, it is our intention to publish only selected correspondence in the paper journal and to edit this as necessary according to space and style imperatives. Only correspondence that relates to original research, review or editorial articles will be considered and in every case we will seek a response from the article's authors. This is an opportunity for our international readership to share its cardiovascular experience, interrogate our authors and participate in scientific debate. Instructions for corresponding authors can be found at http://heart.bmj.com/ifora/article_type.dtl#correspondence.

We look forward to hearing from you.

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